
The Reverend Mr. *WILLATS*'s

S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D

In *York-Minster*, July 8. 1744.

A T T H E

A S S I Z E S

Holden for the County of *YORK*.

The Royal Academy of Sciences

MEMORANDUM

REPORT

In 1744



AT THE

ASSIZES

Held for the County of YORK.

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The RELIGION of NATURE,
Which is now set up in Opposition to the
WORD of GOD,
Proved to be a mere IDOL from the very Text
that has been so often produced in its Favour.

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S E R M O N

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In *York-Minster*, July 8. 1744.

A T T H E

A S S I Z E S

Holden for the County of *York*,

Before the Honourable

Thomas Burnet, Esq;

One of His Majesty's Justices of His Court
of *Common-Pleas*;

A N D

Charles Clark, Esq;

One of the Barons of his Majesty's Court of *Exchequer*.

*And now publish'd at the Request of the High-Sheriff,
and the Gentlemen of the Grand Jury.*

By *CH. A. WILLATS, M. A.*
Rector of *Plumtree* in *Nottinghamshire*.

Let God be true, but every Man a Liar. Rom. iii. 4.

LONDON: Printed for W. INNYs in *Pater-*
Noster-Row. MDCCXLIV.

The Religion of Nature
 which is now set up in Opposition to the
 Word of GOD
 proved to be a mere fiction from the very fact
 that it has been so often professed in its history.

IN A REMONSTRANCE

Presented
 to the House of Commons
 at the
 Session of 1745



of the House of Commons
 and
 Charles Clark, Esq;
 of the House of Commons

Printed by W. Innes in London
 in the Year 1745

To the Worshipful

GODFREY COPLEY, Esq;

High Sheriff of the County of YORK,

And the Gentlemen of the Grand Jury,

The Honourable <i>Christopher</i>	<i>Richard Turbut, Esq;</i>
<i>Dawney, Esq;</i>	<i>Edward Rookes, Esq;</i>
Sir <i>William Foulis, Bart.</i>	<i>Henry Browne, Esq;</i>
<i>Richard Langly, Esq;</i>	<i>William Burton, Esq;</i>
<i>John Twisleton, Esq;</i>	<i>Richardson Farrand, Esq;</i>
<i>William Wrightson, Esq;</i>	<i>Timothy Sterne, Esq;</i>
<i>Richard Beaumont, Esq;</i>	<i>Jeremiah Rawson, Esq;</i>
<i>Thomas Fawkes, Esq;</i>	<i>Edward Foster, Esq;</i>
<i>Henry Yarborough, Esq;</i>	<i>John Smith, Esq;</i>
<i>George Cooke, Esq;</i>	<i>Philip Harland, Esq;</i>
<i>William Simpson, Esq;</i>	<i>John Burton, Esq;</i>
<i>James Farrer, Esq;</i>	<i>Lionel Copley, Esq;</i>

GENTLEMEN,

I Now present you with the following Sermon, which at your Request I have ventur'd to publish: I had designed to have annexed to it a full Explication of another famous Text
that

DEDICATION.

that is often cited in Favour of the Law of Nature. This has caused some little Alteration in the Form of my Discourse, as well as delayed the Publication of it.

But that Argument soon grew under my Hands to a Size, that I thought somewhat disproportionate, and too large for an Appendix. It may perhaps, if it shall be deemed necessary, be shortly printed in a distinct Discourse by itself.

I am not so vain as to expect that others will now read this Sermon with the same Candor that you were pleased to receive it from the Pulpit. I know there are many truly great and justly admired Names, as well as some strong Prejudices against the Doctrine contained in it. But I am so fully convinced, not only of the Truth, but of the Importance too of what I have advanced, that if the Reader will only bring along with

with
shall
Judge

DEDICATION.

with him the Spirit of the *Christian*, I
shall not much fear the Severity of the
Judge. I am,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most obedient, and

most humble Servant,

Charles Willats.

DEDICATION

With him the Spirit of the Christian, I
shall not much fear the severity of the
Judge. I am,

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Let me be obedient, and

Charles Willats

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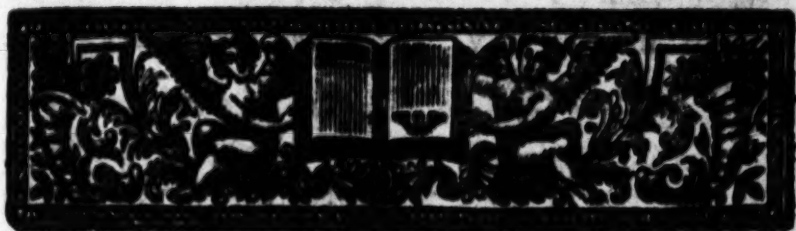
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ROM. II. 14,†15.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law, these having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves: Which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts. - - -

THE Religion of Nature has been for many Years the favourite Idol of this Protestant Kingdom. The Scriptures were formerly esteemed the sole Rule of Faith, and the only Standard of Divine Truth. But the Word of God must now, it seems, give the Way and Precedency to this great and superior Law of Nature; which has of late been cry'd up with as much Noise and Clamour, and perhaps with as little Sense too, as the great Goddess *Diana* was by the *Ephe- sians*, when the greater Part of those, who
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joined in the Cry, *knew not wherefore they were come together.*

To this supreme Law the Characters of Divinity have been expressly ascribed.

It is, they say, Eternal and Unchangeable, antecedent to the Will of God, and independent on it.—It is so exceeding clear in its Principles, that it is the only true Light *that enlighteneth every Man that cometh into the World.*—It is so full and perfect in its Rules, that God himself can neither add to it, nor diminish ought from it.—It is so universal in its Extent, that it comprehends the whole Race of Mankind; all Kings must fall down before it, and all Nations upon Earth do it Service.—It is so authoritative in its Dictates, that God as well as Man, the Creator as well as the Creature, is obliged to conform to it.

From this single Source and Fountain of Light, we are told, that all the right Notions of the Deity are originally derived, and all the great Lines of Morality drawn; insomuch that unless these are first known and believed, *Revelation itself can signify nothing to us*: for Natural Religion is the sole Foundation of all that is instituted and revealed.

Now

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Now all these Assertions seem to me very shocking Positions, not only incapable of being reconciled to the Word of God, but of fatal Tendency to strengthen the Hands of those that oppose it. And in Fact we find, that the keenest Arrows that have been shot against Christianity, have been drawn from this Quiver. What some very good Men have made the only Foundation of our Faith, other very bad Men have, perhaps with less Inconsistency, made the principal Foundation of their Infidelity. And if our Divines will still tell them, that unless all the great Things contained in their Law of Nature, are first known and believed, the Revelation of God himself can signify Nothing; we cannot, I think, much wonder, that they should now at last tell our Divines, that where all these great Things are first known and believed, Revelation can signify Little.

For the very End of Revelation is, I presume, to discover to us, by a supernatural Light from Heaven, those Truths which we are naturally ignorant of, and not the Truths which we naturally know; and these, with Submission, I must believe are Truths of the highest, and not of the least Importance, to

the Glory of God, and the Salvation of Man.

But to get, if possible, to the Bottom of this Subject; I would fain learn from the present Advocates of the Religion of Nature, where we may find the *Autographa* of this boasted Law, and the original Text upon which such surprizing Comments have been written. This is a fair Question, and which I think ought to be as fairly answer'd.

But these great Men must know, that 'tis only sending us upon a Fool's Errand, to bid us consult the great Digest and Pandect of Nature, and the everlasting Tables of right Reason, which, they say, are much more ancient, and by some Expressions, it should seem, more sacred too, than the very Tables on which God himself wrote the Commandments he deliver'd to *Moses*. For ask now of the Days that are past, since the Day that God created Man upon the Earth; and ask from the one Side of Heaven unto the other, Who, of all the Sons of *Adam*, ever saw these everlasting Tables, or ever heard of any Library upon Earth, where this Digest of Nature was to be found? And what God has never once mentioned nor recommended to our Notice, and

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and no Man to this Day can tell us where we may find, I shall look upon as a mere Idol, which some Moderns have set up in their Hearts, but which, in the strictest Sense of St. Paul's Words, is *Nothing in the World*.

But I seem perhaps to forget my Text, of which I expect now to be reminded, and of those strong Expressions contained in it, where St. Paul, as these learned Men will needs have it, does expressly affirm, That the *Gentiles* themselves, who had not the Law of *Moses*, nor any Revelation from God, did yet by the mere Strength and Light of Nature do the great Things contain'd in the Law; and though they had not the Law, yet they were a sufficient Law unto themselves, and shewed the grand Work of the Law written on their Hearts; which plainly proves that there is a Law of Nature antecedent to the reveal'd Will of God, and independent on it, that is written in the Hearts of all Mankind.

Now I am fully convinced, that the modern Geographer may as soon find the very Spot of Ground where Paradise stood, before the Earth was broken down and dissolved at
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the Deluge; and the apostate *Jew* as soon discover that unknown Region of the World, where the Ten Tribes of *Israel* lye concealed to this Day; as either the Infidel or the Christian can find those *Gentiles*, that did by the mere Strength of Nature do the great Things contained in the Law of *Moses*. For it is plain from almost every Page in the Bible, that after the Days of *Moses*, till the coming of Christ, there was not a single Nation under Heaven, the *Jews* only excepted, that either knew or worshipped the true God. And how it was possible for those, who knew not God, to do the great Things contained in the Law of God, it will require more Philosophy, I believe, than even these great Men are Masters of, to shew. And that St. *Paul* himself never once dreamed of this boasted Law of Nature, that is said to be written in Mens Hearts; and that those learned Men, who have urged this Passage as a strong Proof of it, did only dream so, is what I shall now endeavour to prove. From which Account we shall, I hope, at last find the true Meaning of this mis-translated and mistaken Passage, and be able perhaps to discover the Rise of those unhappy Doctrines that have been built upon it.

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The great Mr. *Locke*, who has wrote a very elaborate Comment upon this Epistle, justly admired St. *Paul* as a very close Reasoner, who always argued to the Point he was upon; and as a great Master of Address too, who always took care to give as little Offence as possible to his Countrymen the *Jews*.

But if now, according to the common Interpretation, the *Gentiles* in my Text were those *Gentiles* who continued under that Apostasy and Revolt from God, which the first *Gentiles* in the preceding Chapter began, it will pose the acutest Reasoner upon Earth to reconcile the amiable Character St. *Paul* gives of the one, with the very black and hideous Colours in which he describes the other.

Read over that large Catalogue of stupendous Sins, to which the first *Gentiles* were abandoned by God upon their Apostasy from him; and then compare them, and try if it is possible, that those *Gentiles* who persevered in this Apostasy from the true God, could deserve, or be in any Sense capable of that Character which St. *Paul* gives them in the Text before us. The former Description pre-
sents

sents us with a ghastly Scene of the greatest Enormities that Man can commit ; the latter, if I do not greatly mistake, expresses in few Words the Height of Piety and Goodness. — But let us take this Passage in another Light. The Apostle had said in the very Verse before my Text, that not *the Hearers of the Law are just before God, but the Doers of the Law shall be justified*. But if you now ask, Who these Doers of the Law are ? St. Paul, that great Master of Address, who is so very tender of shocking his Countrymen the *Jews*, is plainly *made* to answer in the very next Words, that they are the *Gentiles* who continue in open Apostasy from God. These, it seems, are the Doers of the Law which shall be justified ; for though they have not the Law, yet they do the Things contained in the Law, and that by the sole Strength of Nature too, and so compleatly also, that they are a Law unto themselves ; *which shew the Work, or great End, of the Law written on their Hearts*. — This is in truth a Doctrine so shocking, not to *Jews* only, but, I should hope, to all Christians too, that the very naming of it may shew that St. Paul's Words have certainly been mistaken. And yet it is exceeding plain, that in the Verses following my Text, the great

Apostle

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Apostle proceeds in the very same Chain of Argument to shew, that the *Jews* were in truth only Hearers, but not Doers of the Law; and that therefore their Circumcision, in which they so much boasted, was made Uncircumcision: Whereas the *Gentiles* in my Text, whom St. Paul describes in such beautiful Colours, are the Uncircumcision that keep the Righteousness of the Law, and which shall be therefore counted for Circumcision. They are, as it is expressed in the next Verse, the Uncircumcision by Nature, that, in the strongest Word the Apostle could use, *fulfils* the Law; and therefore must condemn the *Jew*, who by the Letter and Circumcision transgresseth the Law. For he is not a *Jew*, who is one outwardly, and can plead only his carnal Descent from *Abraham*; neither is that Circumcision, which is outward in the *Flesh*: But he is the *Jew*, who is one inwardly; a true *Israelite* indeed, of the Faith of their Father *Abraham*: and Circumcision is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men but of God.—These, as St. Paul speaks in another Place, are the Circumcision that worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no Confidence in the *Flesh*. And such I

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will now presume are the *Gentiles* in my Text.

For to bring this Point to a short Issue: *St. Paul* was the Apostle of the *Gentiles*, sent to open their Eyes, to turn them from *Darkness to Light*, and from the *Power of Satan unto God*.

Now these *Gentiles* in my Text must be either those who were converted, or those who still sat in *Darkness and the Shadow of Death*, under the Dominion of the Devil, without *Christ*, without *Hope*, and without *God in the World*. If they were *Gentiles* by Nature, who were now converted to *Christ*, the Character *St. Paul* gives them in my Text is consistent with every Text in Scripture, which speaks of the first Converts in as high Terms; but if they were still under the Power of *Satan*, you may as soon reconcile *Light and Darkness*, *Christ and Belial* together, as make the received Interpretation of this Passage consistent either with common Sense, or the Word of *God*.

For what, I beseech you, are the Things contained in the Law? Is not the very first
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and greatest Commandment of all, *Thou shalt have no other Gods but me?* Is not the Second, *Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven Image—Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them?* Are not these Two in a manner the Sum and Substance of the whole Law, insisted on and inculcated over and over in every Chapter of the Bible? And could the *Gentiles* after all, before they were converted and turned from Idols to serve the living God who made Heaven and Earth, do the things contained in this Law? It is a glaring and barefaced Contradiction.

Moses tells us, that *whoever sacrificeth unto any Gods, save unto Jehovah only, shall be utterly destroyed.* And were the *Gentiles* who, *St. Paul* says, *sacrificed unto Devils, and not unto God,* the very same *Gentiles* who, the same Apostle tells us, *did the things contained in the Law?* It is the Height of Absurdity, and absolutely impossible.

But here I suppose, by some great Men we shall be told, that these Laws were given to the *Israelites* only, and not to the *Gentiles.* I own it; I plead for it: The Strength of my Argument, against their boasted Law of Na-

ture is from this irresistible, and the astonishing Weakness of their Plea from the Words of my Text demonstrable. *God had indeed shewed his Word unto Jacob, his Statutes and Judgments unto Israel; but he had not dealt so with any other Nation, neither had the Heathen any Knowledge of his Laws.* No; it was in *Judah* only that God himself was known, his Name was great in *Israel*; whereas all the Gods of the Nations were Idols: But *Jebo-vah* made the Heavens.

But where then, in the mean time, was this boasted Law of Nature? or what was the Light thereof? which during this long Night of Pagan Darkeness could not distinguish an Idol from the living God, nor the Creature from the Creator, who is blessed for ever? And shall we be still told, that natural Religion is the sole Foundation of that which is revealed? So that where the Being and Attributes of God, and other great Points of Morality, are not first known by the Light of Nature, Revelation itself can signify *nothing*; and that it is indeed ridiculous in all respects to pretend to prove these Things by Revelation? But how comes it to pass, I beseech you, with due Reverence be it spoken, that

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that an Argument from the Mouth of God shall be thought ridiculous, which in the Mouth of a modern Philosopher shall carry the Force of Demonstration? What! Is not the Bible as good a Book, and as sufficient too for the Conviction of an Atheist, as Dr. *Clarke's* Book of the Being and Attributes of God? Or cannot this Almighty Being reveal himself to them that know him not, discover himself even to them that seek him not, and manifest himself to them that ask not after him? — What! Was not Christ then in Truth a *Light to lighten the Gentiles* who knew not God? Or did he not indeed send his Apostles to open the Eyes of these blind Pagans, *to turn them from Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God?*

And is it after all ridiculous, in all respects ridiculous, to pretend to prove these Things from Revelation? And does Revelation itself necessarily presuppose these Things as first known, and always speak of them as presupposed, when the Scriptures not only *suppose*, but in the most express Terms *affirm* them to be absolutely *unknown* to the whole *Gentile* World; and that there was not a single People upon Earth, besides the *Jews* to whom the

Oracles

Oracles of God were committed, that either knew or worshipped the true God? And is it now possible to conceive that St. *Paul* himself could affirm, that the *Gentiles* before their Conversion, even while they knew not God, but did Service to them who were by Nature no Gods, did at the same time do the Things contained in the Law of God? That while they were thus given over to a reprobate Mind, suffered to walk in their own Ways, and to follow their own Imaginations, they were yet a Law unto themselves? and that the Heathen, even when they had not any Knowledge of God's Laws, did yet shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts? In truth, I am quite ashamed to expose in this manner the Nakedness of this Interpretation; but I hope the Importance of the Subject will be my Excuse.

The great Apostle of the *Gentiles* had converted many Thousands of them to the Faith of Christ; but in every Epistle which he writes to confirm them in this Faith, he never fails to remind them of the deplorable State they were in, before their Conversion to it. — They were then without Strength, the Servants of Sin, and Enemies in their Mind
by

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by wicked Works; nay, they were even dead in Sins, and *by Nature* the Children of Wrath, even as others. And is it possible that they could at the same time do, and that *by Nature* too, the Things contained in the Law?—He tells them, that before their Conversion they lived as other *Gentiles* live, in *Fornication, Uncleanneſs, inordinate Affection, evil Concupiſcence*, and all thoſe Sins, *for which the Wrath of God cometh upon the Children of Diſobedience*: And were they at that time alſo a ſufficient Law unto themſelves? He reminds them, that *in Times paſt they walked as other Gentiles walk, in the Vanity of their Minds, having their Underſtanding darkned, being alienated from the Life of God, through the Ignorance that is in them, becauſe of the Blindneſs of their Hearts, who being paſt feeling have given themſelves over unto Laſciviuſneſs, to work all Uncleanneſs with Greedi- neſs*. And can the wildeſt Imagination believe that the ſame Apoſtle could affirm, that they did at that time *ſhew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts*? What a Load of Abſurdities does this ſingle Interpretation of my Text throw upon the great Apoſtle *St. Paul*? and yet how greedily has it been caught at by ſome learned Men to advance a favourite

favourite Notion, that I verily think is inconsistent with, and plainly condemned in almost every Page of Scripture. I could easily heap Argument upon Argument, and still heighten this accumulative Evidence in Proof of my Assertion. For so far was St. Paul from once thinking of this boasted Law of Nature, so far from once speaking one single Word in its Favour, so far from asserting that the invisible Things of God could ever be discovered by the bare Light of it, that he not only affirms over and over, that *the Gentiles knew not God*; but moreover proves too, that they never could have known him, unless God in his infinite Mercy had first sent his Apostles to preach and reveal him unto them. This, in St. Paul's Judgment, was the only Means by which God could ever be found of them that sought him not, or be made manifest to them that asked not after him; and I am quite amazed, that good Christians should differ so widely from him. For pray what is the Meaning of that remarkable Phrase St. Paul uses to the *Galatians*, whom he had himself converted? *Then when ye knew not God, ye did service to them who are by nature no Gods: but now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God*—This Expression seems to me with great Strength and Beauty to imply,

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ply, that unless God had first visited the *Gentiles* to take out of them a People for his Name, and had been pleased to have first owned *them* for his Servants, they had never known or owned *him* for their God. And from this very Argument St. Paul at once justifies himself to the *Jews*, and pleads the Necessity of his Mission to the *Gentiles*. God had often spoken of a new Covenant that he would make in the latter Days, when there should be no longer Difference between *Jew* and *Gentile*; but, in the Words of the Prophet *Joel*, *Whoever should call upon the Name of Jehovah should be saved*. Upon which the Apostle immediately breaks out in these remarkable Words: *How then shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a Preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? So then Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*. We have here, I think, as plain a Demonstration as any in *Euclid*, that as the *Gentile* World knew not God, believed not in him, and had not so much as heard of him; so they could never have called upon his Name for Salvation, unless God had first sent his Apostles to reveal him, and to preach the Go-

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spel of Peace, even the glad Tidings of Salvation unto them. This single Passage of the great Apostle of the *Gentiles* carries such Conviction along with it, and strikes with such a Force, as is sufficient to tear up at once this imaginary Law of Nature by the Roots. It shews in the strongest Point of Light the absolute Necessity of Revelation, and that Christ was, in the highest Sense of the Words, *a Light to lighten the Gentiles*; and at the same time proves, that the Religion of Nature, to which the Characters of Divinity are now ascribed, and which is by some set up in direct Opposition to the Gospel, is in truth as gross a Fiction, and as mere an Idol, as any of the Gods which the Heathens themselves worshipped.

And had the Words in my Text been rightly pointed in the Original, only by placing the Comma after *φύσει* instead of before it, and then literally translated, *When the Gentiles, which have not the Law by Nature, do the Things contained in the Law*; the Words had been strong and beautiful, and the Sense of them plain and obvious: there had been no room for mistaking St. Paul's Meaning, nor the least Shadow of an Argument to be drawn from them in favour of the Law of Nature.

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It had then evidently appeared, that the *Gentiles* in my Text, *which do the Things contained in the Law*, were the Uncircumcision that *keeps the Righteousness of the Law*; the Uncircumcision by Nature that fulfils the Law; and that therefore shall be counted for Circumcision, even the true *Circumcision of the Heart, whose Praise is not of Men, but of God.*

The very learned * *Grotius*, who was willing enough to build something like a Law of Nature upon this Text, yet plainly saw, and was so ingenuous as to own, that the Words might fairly be translated as I have render'd them; but the Context plainly shews, and the Sense of the whole Scripture proves, that they not only fairly *may*, but necessarily *ought* to be so translated.

The *Jews* indeed were born under the Law, and so they had the Law by Nature, that is, from their very Birth, which the *Gentiles* had not; and it should be remember'd, that *we who are Jews by Nature, and not Sinners of the Gentiles*, are the very Words of our great Apostle himself in his Speech to

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St. Pe-

* Lib. I. Cap. 1/§. 16. Par. 6. De Jur. Bell. & Pac.

St. Peter : And yet I verily think it would be the Height of Absurdity to affirm of the best *Jews* that ever lived, that they *did by Nature the Things contained in the Law*. But to affirm this of the *Gentiles*, if there be Degrees of Impossibility, is surely the very First-born of Contradictions, and that whether they were converted to Christ or not: for if they were Converts to the Faith of Christ, it was certainly by *Grace*, and not by *Nature*, that they *did the Things contained in the Law*; but if they were not Converts, but still *Servants to Sin, and under the Power of Satan*, it was absolutely impossible they should do them at all, or ever *shew the Work of the Law written on their Hearts*.

So that, rack and torture this Sentence as long as you please, in the present Position of the Words, as they now stand in our Translation; the Wit of Man can never extract common Sense out of it, or force it to speak any thing, which will not be a flat Contradiction to the whole Scripture.

But to do Justice to my Argument, and throw in still more Light upon this greatly-mistaken Passage, let us now enquire into the original Design of the Law; that so we may
better

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better understand what *the Work of the Law* is, and what *the Things contained in it* mean, in the Text before us.

The *Jews*, we know, greatly boasted of their Law: This was not their Fault; they might justly have so boasted. For what Nation under Heaven was there so great, that had Statutes and Judgments so righteous, as all that Law which God, by the Hands of his Servant *Moses*, had set before them? But their great Misfortune, and their great Fault too was, that they had now by their vain Traditions quite mistaken the original Design of their Law; which, as *St. Paul* tells them, was *their School-master to bring them to Christ, who is the End of the Law for Righteousness to every one that believeth*; and who had been promised as an universal Blessing to the whole World long before their Law was given by *Moses*. For the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Heathen through Faith, preached before the Gospel to *Abraham*, saying, *In thee and thy Seed shall all Nations be blessed*.

Now this original Covenant, as *St. Paul* finely argues, which *was before confirmed of God in Christ*; or rather, as I think it should be

be translated, *to Christ*, who was the Seed meant in the Promise; *the Law*, which was *four hundred Years* after, and given to a single People only, *could not disannul, that it should make the former Promise void, or of none Effect.* That still subsisted in the same Force and Vigour under the Law, as it did before it. For surely the Performance of one Covenant, which God made with their Fathers, *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, to give unto their Posterity the Land of *Canaan* for a Possession, was no Proof that he was unmindful of that better Covenant, in which all the Nations of the Earth were to be blessed.

You will ask, Wherefore then serveth the Law, which was given with such amazing Pomp and Terror to the Children of *Israel* only, with an utter Exclusion of the whole *Gentile* World, from whom they were by this Law separated and distinguished by the strongest Fence and Partition-Wall that God himself could raise between them?

Why, all this notwithstanding, the Law was by no means against the Promises of God, as *St. Paul* speaks; but, on the contrary, design'd to keep up the Remembrance of them in the Earth, and was only *added*, in the Apostle's

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postle's Phrase, *'till the Seed should come*, to whom the original Promise of this universal Blessing was made ; but with infinite Wisdom added, *because of Transgressions*. For the whole Gentile World were now in a State of Apostasy from God ; they served and adored the Heavens, instead of the God that created them ; they worshipped the Sun, Moon, and Stars, even all the Host of Heaven : These, they thought, were the Gods that governed the World, that gave them Rain and fruitful Seasons, and to whom they were indebted for all the Products of the Earth, and all the Blessings they enjoyed in it. And it is well known from every Page of Scripture, that the Children of *Israel*, from the Day that God delivered them out of the Land of *Egypt*, 'till their Return from their Captivity in *Babylon*, were ever prone to follow these Abominations of the Heathen, *in transgressing the Covenant of the Lord, and worshipping the Host of Heaven* *.

Because of these Transgressions therefore, and to keep alive the Knowledge of the true God in the World, which would otherwise have been soon lost out of it, was the Law added, until

* See the 20th Chapter of *Ezekiel* throughout.

until the promised Seed should come, in whom all the Nations of the Earth were to be *bleſſed*, and in whom all the Promiſes of God from the Foundation of the World are *Yea*, and *Amen*.

But when the Law had done the great Work intended by God, and answered the End propoſed by him that gave it; when Chriſt, the Seed promiſed to *Abraham*, and ſo punctually deſcribed both by *Moſes* and the Prophets, was now actually come; the Fence between *Jew* and *Gentile* is of courſe removed, and the Partition-Wall broken down: *For now*, in the prophetick Language of the Pſalmiſt, *God hath made known his Salvation, his Righteouſneſs hath he openly ſhewed in the Sight of the Heathen: He hath remembered his Mercy and Truth towards the Houſe of Iſrael, and all the Ends of the Earth have ſeen the Salvation of our God.*

This Salvation was what all the Faithful, who looked for Redemption in *Iſrael*, plainly waited for, as well as their Father *Jacob*, when juſt before his Death he uttered thoſe remarkable Words: *I have waited for thy Salvation, O Lord*: And which old *Simeon* fully explains, when he had his Saviour in his Arms,

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Arms, and said, *Lord, now lettest thou thy Servant depart in Peace; for mine Eyes have seen thy Salvation, which thou hast prepared before the Face of all People: a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of thy People Israel.*

There remains therefore now no Difference between Jew and Gentile. For the Righteousness of God *without the Law*, as St. Paul emphatically expresses it, is now manifested, being fully witnessed both by the Law and the Prophets, which the Jews have in their own Hands; and by which it is plain, that *Christ is the End of the Law for Righteousness to every one that believeth.* And therefore when the Gentiles in my Text, which by Nature have not the Law, do the τὰ τῷ νόμῳ, the Things originally intended by, and virtually contained in the Law; when they renounce their Idols, and no longer worship the Host of Heaven, but turn to the Service of the living God, who made Heaven and Earth; when they accept of that Salvation that is now made known unto them, and submit to the Righteousness of God that is now manifested in their Sight; these, though they have not the Law, are a Law unto themselves, their Faith in Christ and his Doctrine does more than supply the Place of the Law of Moses; and by their Submission to that promised Seed,

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in whom all the Nations of the Earth were to be blessed, and who is *the very End of the Law* itself for Righteousness to every one that believeth, they evidently shew the great Work of the Law written in their Hearts.

This is now the true, the plain, and full Meaning of this greatly mistaken Passage; and which I think could not possibly have been mistaken, as I before observed, if it had not been first mispointed in the Original; but the Comma being placed before *quod* instead of after it, the Term *Nature* was in every Version thrown into a wrong Position; and *the Law written in their Hearts* following so soon after in the same Sentence, these Words, which have not the least Relation to each other, and which in their true Meaning are as opposite as Light and Darknes, were blended and confounded together: and from this odd Jumble of the Words first sprang, as I conceive, the famous Doctrine of innate Ideas, and of I know-not-what imaginary Law of Nature originally stamped and impressed upon the Soul of Man at his first coming into the World; the Absurdity of which Doctrine has been so fully and so justly exposed by the late celebrated Mr. *Locke*, that I need not enlarge upon it. It will be much more to our Purpose

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pose to observe, that to have *the Law written in our Hearts*, is a Phrase that, in the Scripture Language, expresses, not the State of a blind Pagan that knew not God, but the most consummate Piety, and the utmost Perfection of Holiness; just as Sin itself, when arrived to its full Growth, is said to be *written or graven on the Heart*. Thus when Judah had most grievously revolted from God, and went a whoring after the Idols of the Nations, the Prophet says, *The Sin of Judah is written with a Pen of Iron, and with the Point of a Diamond; it is graven on the very Tables of their Hearts*. Whereas when God speaks to his most faithful Servants, the Stile then runs, *Hearken unto me, ye that know Righteousness; ye People in whose Heart is my Law*. So the Psalmist also describes the State of such Persons, *The Righteous shall inherit the Land, and dwell therein for ever: the Law of his God is in his Heart, none of his Steps shall slide*. And when Christ himself cometh into the World, he saith, *I delight to do thy Will, O God; yea, thy Law is within my Heart*.

And that exceeding great Promise of God, which was to take place under the new Covenant, that he would make with the House of *Israel*, is conveyed in these remarkable Words:

After those Days I will put my Law in their Minds, and will write it in their Hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my People. And I will be merciful to their Sins, and their Iniquities will I remember no more.

With a View to this gracious Promise, I suppose, when the Ten Commandments are recited in the Communion Service, the Church puts into our Mouth that most significant and comprehensive Prayer, *Lord, have mercy upon us, and write all these thy Laws in our Hearts, we beseech thee.* This is, I think, a full Explication of what is meant in Scripture by *the Law written in our Hearts*; and I would now willingly hope, that the Christian at least is convinced, that it is written not by Nature, but by the Spirit of the living God; nor on Tables of Stone only, as St. Paul speaks; but what is still a much greater Blessing, on the fleshly Tables of the Heart.

In a word therefore, and to conclude; The whole Design of this Discourse has been to vindicate the Honour of Christianity, and to shew the absolute Necessity of Revelation. To make you duly sensible, how infinitely we stand indebted, not to the Light of Nature, which, in the Things of God, is the very Blackness of Darkness, but to the marvelous

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velous Light of Christ's Gospel : and to give you the strongest Conviction of that stupendous Instance of God's Love to a whole World of Sinners, who had apostatized and revolted from him ; when he sent his only-begotten Son into the World, that *whosoever believeth in him, might not perish, but have everlasting Life.* For from the very Darkness of Paganism it is now clearly visible, that without Faith it was impossible for the *Gentiles* either to please, or even to know God. And the Natural-Religion-Man himself will, I presume, subscribe to this Truth, *That he that cometh unto God, must first believe, not only that he is, but that he is a Rewarder also of them that diligently seek him.* Of which blessed Reward, that we may all at last be Partakers, by having his Laws now written on our Hearts, God of his infinite Mercy grant, for the sake of his only Son Christ Jesus our Lord ; to whom be ascribed all Glory and Dominion both now and for evermore.

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